UNITED NATIONS **A**

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.96/SR.556
9 October 2001

Original: ENGLISH

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Fifty-second session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 556th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 3 October 2001, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. MOLANDER (Sweden)

CONTENTS

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4) (continued)

1. Mr. GANTCHEV (Observer for Bulgaria) said that the international community had been confronted with new challenges after the terrorist attacks of 11 September against the United States of America, which made the role of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) all the more important. He looked forward to the Ministerial Meeting to be held in December 2001 and the adoption of guidelines that would shape the agenda for protection in the years ahead.

2. In the context of Bulgaria's accession to the European Union, the Government was amending its legislation on refugees to bring it into line with the 1951 United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees and European Union legislation on asylum. It had become obvious that there was a need for refugee registration and integration centres in the country, and for refugee housing. In that connection, the Government was transforming Bulgaria from a transit to a host country as part of its preparations for joining the European asylum system and assuming responsibilities as an external border of the European Union. The Government had also taken part in regional exercises with a refugee component so as to improve preparedness for crisis situations. In addition the Government cooperated closely with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on behalf of refugees.

3. Mr. MWANFULI (Observer for Zambia) said that Zambia, which was adjacent to two major conflict areas, was currently hosting some 250,000 refugees. Strengthening the response capacity of UNHCR was important in view of the inability of less developed countries to respond to emergencies. His Government also attached importance to the security of humanitarian staff, which required greater cooperation between host countries and UNHCR. Repatriation was the best durable solution to refugee situations. In order to make it viable, the international community must provide support for peace initiatives in countries of origin. His Government had difficulty in accepting local integration as a durable solution, and as far as resettlement was concerned, resettlement countries should consider broadening the criteria for acceptance.

4. While his Government was committed to maintaining an open-door policy towards asylum seekers, without international assistance the country's stability would be endangered. He appealed for improved funding for UNHCR programmes, which should be targeted at both refugees and host communities. Donors should also support other agencies that worked with UNHCR. Lastly, there should be more recognition of the contributions in kind made by less developed countries that hosted refugee populations.

5. Mr. BRENNAN (South Africa) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement by Malawi on behalf of the Southern African Development Community.

6. His delegation commended the High Commissioner's emphasis on the need for durable solutions and his focus on the complex challenge presented by flows of refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants. Nevertheless, his Government would welcome a greater emphasis on prevention and on addressing the root causes of displacement, including the promotion and

protection of human rights and good governance in countries of origin. In that regard he urged UNHCR to contribute to the new African initiative launched by the Organization of African Unity. The focus on core activities should be tempered by consideration for the divergent realities in displacement situations worldwide. Protection and assistance activities on the African continent were shamefully under-resourced, so that the austerity measures implemented under Actions 1 and 2 had been particularly painful. In that connection he trusted that there would be a positive impact on geographical distribution in terms of staffing particularly at senior levels.

7. He welcomed the positioning of displacement situations in a sustainable development paradigm and the appeal to donors to consider development-oriented funding arrangements. His delegation shared the concern for staff security and welcomed the steps taken. Similarly, the improvements in emergency preparedness and response capacity were to be commended. He noted the increasingly important role of civil society in humanitarian endeavours, including the protection of asylum seekers and refugees. Lastly, he welcomed the assistance provided to his Government by UNHCR in dealing with the backlog of refugee status determination cases.

8. Ms. KASINGO (Namibia) said that her delegation welcomed the focus on the dignity of refugees, but noted that not all countries were in a position to provide for them adequately. Her Government was concerned at the lack of resources available to it to cope with the country's refugee population, which stood at over 20,000. Water supplies were under increasing strain in refugee areas. Efforts were under way to identify new locations for refugees in Namibia so as to allow them to engage in agriculture. The Government also provided school facilities for children and study programmes for adults. Nevertheless, more resources were needed. It was, of course, difficult to predict refugee flows, but it seemed certain that the continued terrorizing of the population in Angola by UNITA (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola) would lead to an increase in refugee numbers. UNHCR should play a more active role in tackling such root causes by participating in conflict resolution. The presence of soldiers among civilian refugees represented a serious security threat to her Government, and she appealed for UNHCR's assistance in dealing with soldiers separately.

9. She associated her delegation with the statement by the Southern African Development Community. The presence of internally displaced persons hampered socio-economic development, and merited close scrutiny and additional resources. She agreed with the High Commissioner that the gap between emergency relief and long-term development must be closed. Namibia acted within the framework of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, and the Organization of African Unity Refugee Convention of 1969. It would make every effort to accede to all other relevant international instruments.

10. Ms. ZEMICHAEL (Observer for Eritrea) expressed her delegation's dismay at the terrorist events of 11 September.

11. The voluntary return of Eritrean refugees who had fled to the Sudan during the war had resumed. Some 20,000 refugees had returned so far in 2001, and an additional 140,000 were expected to follow by the end of 2002. The reintegration of those refugees would require an extended development programme. She welcomed the review of UNHCR's core activities,

operations, structures and fund-raising strategies. However, budgetary reductions must not compromise the services that UNHCR was mandated to deliver. The linkage between refugees and internally displaced persons must also receive due consideration.

12. Her Government was engaged in national reconstruction and the reintegration of internally displaced persons, returnees and demobilized combatants. Those programmes formed part of a comprehensive national reconstruction and development strategy. There was a fully functional coordination mechanism between the various humanitarian and developmental actors engaged in Eritrea, which had been instrumental in the effective utilization of resources. Durable solutions were attainable provided that refugees were given assistance in regaining livelihoods.

13. Ms. ANDJELIC (Observer for Bosnia and Herzegovina) said that there had been good progress in returns to Bosnia and Herzegovina by members of minorities, with some 150,000 registered since 1999. It was significant that returns were occurring in localities that had been "no go" areas a few years previously. Real progress had also been made in connection with property laws and claims for property restitution; some 30 per cent of the approximately 250,000 outstanding claims had resulted in repossession. The Government was committed to bringing that issue to a successful conclusion.

14. She noted with concern that the budget of UNHCR had declined, since its presence was required in her country for at least the next two to three years. While there had been some progress in the return of refugees from and to Croatia and from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the numbers were disappointing. A new problem was the increasing number of illegal migrants and an increase in asylum seekers. The Government was seeking to establish a properly functioning asylum system in the context of its Stability Pact. Unfortunately, the reconstruction of destroyed housing was lagging behind the numbers of returning refugees. UNHCR itself estimated that some 22,000 houses were needed for those who had returned or were returning. She appealed to the international community for additional funds for that purpose. That would make a real contribution to stability.

15. Mr. HARELIMANA (Observer for Rwanda) said that his delegation condemned the terrorist attacks in the United States of America.

16. The funds available for refugee activities in Rwanda following the genocide remained inadequate in comparison with the country's needs. UNHCR should continue its efforts to mobilize funds for assistance to refugees and the reintegration of returnees. The gap between emergency and development activities must be bridged in the interest of coexistence. Refugee movements affecting Rwanda continued at a rate of 25,000 to 30,000 annually. He called on the international community to maintain its support for socio-economic reintegration programmes. In that connection he trusted that UNHCR would assist in the repatriation of unaccompanied Rwandan children. At present there were some 35,000 Congolese and Burundian refugees in Rwanda in need of assistance from UNHCR pending their repatriation. UNHCR assistance would also be required should they ultimately be settled in Rwanda or in third countries. In that regard the Government reaffirmed its support for the principle of voluntary repatriation.

17. The presence of refugees was causing serious environmental problems. UNHCR should provide assistance in the form of programmes for reforestation and provision of other energy sources to replace the use of firewood. He was pleased to report that his Government had recently consolidated its national legislation on the protection of refugees. All States must engage in conflict prevention, promote human rights and improve living conditions so as to prevent new refugee flows.

18. Mr. PETÖCZ (Observer for Slovakia) said his delegation shared the High Commissioner's view that funding to UNHCR should be commensurate with its global importance as a multilateral organization. Slovakia had been able to contribute to the programme budget for the first time in 2001 and hoped to be able to continue to do so. His delegation also welcomed the steps being taken to enable the organization to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century and in particular the recent changes in its Bratislava Office and the UNHCR 2004 process as a whole.

19. Increased efforts would be needed to deal with the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan in the wake of the events of 11 September in the United States and every assistance should be given to the neighbouring countries, which would bear the brunt of refugee flows. Slovakia was prepared, if so requested by UNHCR, to consider providing temporary protection to Afghan refugees, in line with current national legislation.

20. The number of asylum seekers in Slovakia, as in other countries in the region, was constantly growing. Between January and August 2001 there had been a 257 per cent increase over the previous year. Even so, it remained primarily a country of transit for those seeking better economic opportunities in the European Union. As a candidate for European Union membership, Slovakia was currently making efforts to bring its asylum legislation into line with that of European Union countries and was therefore greatly interested in the European Union's own harmonization process. His delegation was pleased with the Global Consultations process and appreciated in particular the discussions on the asylum-migration nexus and complementary forms of protection launched by UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). He was convinced that the outcome of the debate would be practical steps to benefit refugees and a framework for durable solutions to the refugee problem.

21. U SAW TUN (Observer for Myanmar) said that a basic problem in international refugee crises was the varying policies of host States and the lack of institutional regulation of agencies' response. Irregular and illegal migrants should not all be termed refugees and not all refugees should be given asylum. Some so-called refugees were exiles, fugitives, insurgents, terrorists and economic refugees. Myanmar respected the principle of non-refoulement. It also supported asylum for illegal and irregular migrants on humanitarian grounds and international protection for the poor and the vulnerable, but not for destructive elements. Asylum should not be granted to those who abused the system. However, it was often very difficult to distinguish them from genuine refugees and Myanmar therefore believed in stricter immigration policies.

22. As long as there was a demand for foreign labour, there would also be illegal migration and trafficking. Emigration represented a loss of human capital to the country of origin, where that capital was most needed for development. Such outflow of human capital should be prevented and it was important that neighbouring countries should not encourage the illicit

employment of migrant labourers and victims of trafficking. It was natural for people to migrate from less developed areas in one country to neighbouring developed countries. The gap between rich and poor should be narrowed, but neighbouring countries should cooperate in tackling the root causes of migration by harmonizing their development. Coordination of that kind would further enhance UNHCR's achievements and the impact of its humanitarian endeavours.

23. Mr. OSUNDWA (Observer for Kenya) said the refugee problem had become a major global issue that should be addressed by all and not left only to the host countries. Kenya had over the years provided refuge for the victims of forced migration within the region, but the burden needed to be shared and adequate resources should be put at the disposal of those countries that hosted huge numbers of refugees, with all the resulting implications for their development. A number of delicate issues needed to be addressed in order to safeguard genuine refugees. Some persons were inclined to abuse the asylum system and at times there were skirmishes in the camps that aroused fear among others living there and apprehension in the local communities, who saw refugees as exporting their hostilities to the host country. Kenya had continued to try to bring together dissenting factions within the region in pursuit of peace and his delegation believed that the refugee problem involved issues not only of immediate protection but also of sustainable peace, development, stability, reconciliation and coexistence in the countries of origin.

24. There was a clear imbalance in the provision of assistance to refugee programmes. Refugees in Africa existed on the barest minimum and any cuts would seriously affect basic needs such as education and food. Kenya supported UNHCR 2004, which aimed to ensure that UNHCR was appropriately structured and positioned to carry out its role as the main international institution dealing with the refugee problem. It also welcomed the global consultations process, whose outcome, he hoped, would be a consensus document taking into consideration the various concerns expressed regarding international protection. His Government was committed to hosting genuine asylum seekers in accordance with the relevant conventions, and his delegation appealed to the international community to provide more resources to help refugees rebuild their lives and to establish lasting peace in the regions.

25. Mr. SIMONIN (Observer for the Sovereign Order of Malta) agreed with the High Commissioner that it was vital for UNHCR to be able to respond to unexpected emergencies, such as the situation that was developing in Afghanistan following the appalling terrorist attacks on the United States, which the Order of Malta most strongly condemned. Global efforts to combat terrorism must be matched by an equally global effort to avert the humanitarian consequences of such barbaric acts, not only on Afghanistan but also on its neighbours.

26. The Emergency Corps of the Order of Malta (ECOM) was already on the alert: an evaluation team was preparing to visit Iran to assess needs and coordinate actions, in order to make its contribution as effective as possible. The local integration of refugees and reintegration of displaced persons and returnees would require continuing efforts for some time, and the Order of Malta was pursuing sustainable solutions through projects such as a women's programme in Bosnia and construction projects in Kosovo and Cambodia, as well as food centres in Sudan and medical aid for refugees from Myanmar in Thailand.

27. Mr. VIERU (Observer for the Republic of Moldova) said that, in a short period, his country had made significant steps towards democracy. It was no easy task for countries in transition to a market economy to adopt human rights standards. Many regions were exposed to disturbance and disorder, setting up new migratory pressures, and the situation with regard to asylum was particularly complex. Asylum had been made a constitutional right in the Republic of Moldova, in accordance with the international instruments to which it had acceded. There was as yet, however, no mechanism to implement that right. Parliament was considering draft legislation on accession to the 1951 Convention and its Protocol, while legislation on the status of refugees had passed its first reading in May 2001 and was shortly to be presented for the second reading. Refugee problems were coordinated and monitored by the Department for Refugees, which had been established within the Ministry of Justice.

28. While his Government was committed to seeking solutions, some problems depended on others such as the continuing consequences of the Transnistrian military conflict of 1992. No solution had yet been found to the problem of internally displaced persons. Only the proper implementation of the decisions taken at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) summit in Istanbul in 1999 would substantially contribute to effective control of illegal migration in that area. In the meantime, UNHCR offered assistance in formulating strategies in accordance with the principles established in the Programme of Action of the CIS Conference and since 1998 had been preparing programmes to assist internally displaced persons. His Government was grateful to the Japanese Government for its grant to promote reconciliation, the first of its kind after the conflict.

29. UNHCR was active in promoting tolerance and democratic values in the Republic of Moldova, by maintaining contacts with civil society, organizing conferences, translating legislation and providing the Government with know-how and access to international forums. Bilateral assistance was also needed to develop the asylum system and his Government was grateful to the United States Government for its resettlement quota. UNHCR support would be even more necessary after the adoption of the national legal framework on refugee issues, for the implementation of its provisions and the establishment of a central refugee authority. His Government also requested the help of the European Commission and IOM in designing a response mechanism to clandestine migration.

30. He hoped that consultations would continue between his Government and UNHCR on material assistance to implement the Convention. Initial help would be needed with expenses such as lodging, food and medical assistance, which the Republic of Moldova could not provide from its limited budget. He requested the Executive Committee to bear his statement in mind when adopting the Annual Programme Budget.

31. Mr. SIMKHADA (Observer for Nepal) said that the majority of refugees were in developing countries, which struggled to extend them all possible humanitarian aid despite the hardships faced by their own populations. The legitimate concerns of such host countries needed to be taken into account and the international community must be more forthcoming in burden sharing.

32. Despite high economic, social and environmental costs, Nepal had hosted more than 100,000 Bhutanese refugees for more than 10 years. A bilateral dialogue with Bhutan had

been initiated in order to ensure their return. Verification had started but the process needed to be speeded up. Nepal would continue its efforts to see them returned to their country in safety and dignity and thanked UNHCR and the international community for assisting with care and maintenance and supporting efforts to find a durable solution through voluntary repatriation.

33. Mr. RADOVANOVIC (Observer for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia) said Yugoslavia had more refugees than any other European country, with nearly 450,000 refugees from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as 250,000 internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija. As a country in transition, recovering from years of war and economic decline, it faced an extremely difficult task and his Government appreciated the direct humanitarian assistance provided by UNHCR.

34. The international community needed to find a more effective way to close the gap between emergency relief and longer-term development. The Republic of Serbia, for example, which hosted the largest number of refugees, had already initiated a variety of measures within the framework of the national strategy for durable solutions. He hoped that local integration projects would be supported by international financial institutions, UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies.

35. Only 80 internally displaced persons had been repatriated to Kosovo and Metohija in the past two years. Terrorist acts and the absence of freedom of movement were obstructing the return to a decent life for all. Yugoslavia's primary concern remained the restoration of a multi-ethnic community and it was committed to cooperation with the international community.

36. Mr. HUSSAIN (Observer for Iraq) said that Iraq was continuing to coordinate and cooperate with UNHCR in order to facilitate the return of Iraqi refugees. An average of 200 were returning each month. As it had indicated on more than one occasion, his Government was also ready to cooperate with UNHCR in finding durable solutions to the problem of refugees in Iraq who wished to return home, and hoped that UNHCR would continue its humanitarian efforts among the countries concerned in order to facilitate their return. Despite the difficult economic conditions resulting from the embargo, all refugees had been provided with a ration card to enable them to obtain food and medical assistance on an equal footing with Iraqi nationals. Local authorities also allowed refugees access to the labour market and education.

37. Before the imposition of the embargo in 1990, Iraq had provided all assistance to refugees on its territory without needing the support of UNHCR, except with regard to supervision. UNHCR's budget of around US$ 3.25 million for Iraq was modest compared with what it provided for refugees elsewhere in the region, and out of that, some US$ 2.15 million went on administrative expenses for the UNHCR Office in Baghdad, while the remainder was spent on 34,000 refugees. With the ongoing embargo, the Iraqi Government had a responsibility to its own citizens and must prioritize their needs. It therefore requested UNHCR to re-evaluate its activities and particularly its budget for Iraq. It was becoming more and more difficult to provide adequate assistance to refugees and that situation would continue in the future. The time had come for UNHCR to shoulder that responsibility.

38. According to sources in UNHCR, one million Iraqis had left the country since the imposition of the embargo, mainly for economic reasons. His Government hoped they would

return to Iraq and asked the international community to lift the embargo in order to alleviate the suffering of the Iraqi people, stem the flow of migrants and make it easier for those who had left to return.

39. Mr. AL-ATTAR (Observer for Yemen) said that the political crisis in the Horn of Africa had triggered an influx of refugees into Yemen. A national commission had been established to safeguard their interests. The Yemeni Government had endeavoured to tackle the root causes of the refugee problem by sponsoring political reconciliation in the region. The 1951 Convention and its Protocol should be considered the minimum standard for the protection of refugees, with further development of the protection regime required in the light of changing circumstances. For example, international humanitarian law should make provision for the protection of the Palestinian people against the occupying Israeli forces.

40. Mr. LAMB (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) said that the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and its member National Societies were the largest operational partner of UNHCR. IFRC had recently launched fresh appeals for assistance to Afghan refugees and called for redoubled efforts to tackle the problems of discrimination and violence against refugees in general. Governments needed to recommit themselves to the principles enshrined in the 1951 Convention.

41. In partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross, IFRC and the Red Crescent Societies of Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan had made preparations for a mass influx of Afghan refugees to neighbouring countries. That task would be performed most effectively by agencies with an intimate understanding of the needs of the refugees themselves. IFRC would therefore conduct its operations in partnership with the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies on the spot. To that end, several National Societies planning to provide humanitarian assistance had met at IFRC Headquarters in Geneva on 1 October to update each other on their proposed initiatives, consolidate their resources, and coordinate activities at regional level.

42. Mr. MOUNTAIN (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) said that a serious refugee crisis was currently developing in Afghanistan. There was also a crisis of internal displacement. Other Afghans had chosen to stay put, but lacked even the most basic necessities. The principal difficulty facing aid agencies was lack of access to needy populations within Afghanistan itself. Drought and land mines were complicating factors.

43. The unfolding crisis in Afghanistan called for a coordinated plan embracing the entire region. The cohesion of the international response would be strengthened by presenting donors with a single consolidated plan and appeal. Much of the groundwork had already been laid by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA): agreement had been reached with the World Food Programme (WFP) to provide system-wide logistics and support, thereby avoiding unnecessary duplication; a regional humanitarian coordinator had been appointed; the offices of United Nations Resident Coordinators had been strengthened throughout the region; the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team had been mobilized; OCHA personnel formerly stationed in Afghanistan had been relocated to border areas with a view to re-entering the country when circumstances permitted; and a donor alert had been issued, which he hoped would be widely heeded.

44. Ms. CONTAT-HICKEL (International Committee of the Red Cross) said that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was currently assisting more than 5 million displaced people all over the world. Voluntary repatriation was widely recognized as the most desirable durable solution to refugee problems, and all humanitarian actors should cooperate in fostering favourable socio-economic conditions conducive to the safe and dignified return of refugees. States had a particular responsibility to ensure adequate funding for humanitarian and development agencies. ICRC was committed to protecting and assisting the victims of armed conflicts, but other agencies within the United Nations system, or IFRC and its member National Societies, were perhaps better qualified to satisfy the needs of other vulnerable groups such as long-term refugees and displaced persons.

45. A clear-cut division of responsibilities and tasks among humanitarian and aid agencies could only benefit refugees and internally displaced persons, and to that end ICRC had taken part in the inter-agency coordination process organized by OCHA. The same desire for enhanced coordination underlay the annual high-level meetings between ICRC and UNHCR. Nevertheless, humanitarian actors were acutely aware of the fact that they had little control over the underlying causes of conflicts. It was the task of the international community to supply political solutions.

46. Mr. KASTBERG (United Nations Children's Fund) said that children had increasingly been drawn into wars both as combatants and perpetrators of atrocities. At the same time, the protection of civilians in conflict situations, and especially the protection of women and children, had moved to the top of the political agenda. Laws and standards had been enacted to protect refugee children, but enforcement of such instruments remained the most intractable problem. Accountability did not simply mean the prosecution of war criminals; it meant a political and social climate in which violators of children's rights must be made to feel that civilized people everywhere considered their actions to be repugnant. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) pledged to work alongside UNHCR to protect civilians and especially children in armed conflicts.

47. To that end, UNICEF desired closer and earlier involvement in UNHCR plans for the local integration or repatriation of refugees. UNICEF was also prepared to support advocacy efforts designed to encourage political decision-makers to assume their responsibilities and identify solutions to refugee problems. There was scope, furthermore, for closer cooperation with UNHCR in the fields of education and the prevention of HIV/AIDS.

48. Mr. SCHATZER (International Organization for Migration) said that the recent terrorist attacks in the United States of America had simply reinforced suspicion of migrants. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) should join with UNHCR to project a more favourable image of migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees. It should not be forgotten that the motives and aspirations of the vast majority of migrants were perfectly legitimate. The terrorist attacks had brought the Afghan refugee crisis into sharp focus. IOM's local staff in Afghanistan were continuing to carry out essential and worthwhile projects to assist refugees. In conducting its operations, IOM had maintained close contact with its United Nations partners and intended to join the OCHA regional coordinating group based in Islamabad.

49. The High Commissioner had alluded to the challenge of managing complex migratory flows impelled by different motivations. IOM shared his analysis and agreed that the expeditious processing of asylum claims, coupled with community education efforts to dispel misconceptions about asylum-seekers and refugees, should help to improve the situation. It was also essential for the international community to identify administrative principles and practices that promoted orderly movement and deterred irregular migration. Such action could not be achieved through control measures alone. The conditions that impelled people to move also had to be addressed, for example human rights violations and underdevelopment. Campaigns should be launched to keep the general public and decision-makers better informed.

50. Mr. SOLANO (Observer for Guinea) expressed his Government's gratitude for the efforts UNHCR had made, in both the field and through diplomatic channels, to alleviate the burden imposed by the presence of thousands of refugees in Guinea for more than a decade and to mitigate the effect of armed attacks by rebels on Guinea's borders. Guinea appreciated in particular the visit to the country by the High Commissioner and welcomed the improvement in the coordination of humanitarian activities by NGOs and donor countries. Nevertheless, the management of refugee problems in Guinea was becoming increasingly difficult. During the past year attacks on residential areas had forced the Government, with UNHCR assistance, to relocate refugees to the interior of the country, where they and humanitarian relief workers would be safer.

51. There were currently some 200,000 refugees on record from Liberia and Sierra Leone in Guinea, and many more who had not been registered. As the current situation in those two neighbouring countries was conducive to the repatriation of refugees, his Government called upon the international community to launch a repatriation programme there immediately. Such an operation, which would further efforts to secure lasting peace in the subregion, would require the creation of two corridors for humanitarian assistance and the mobilization of resources for the rehabilitation of border control infrastructures, which had been totally destroyed by the rebels.

52. For more than 10 years refugees in Guinea had enjoyed freedom of movement comparable to that of Guineans. Their extended stay in the country, however, had had a profound impact on the environment and on all aspects of people's lives. Moreover, Guinea faced problems posed by the displacement of as much as 5 per cent of its own population as a result of rebel attacks. Those population flows had aggravated poverty in zones already identified as vulnerable before the crisis. The international community should therefore consider the most appropriate ways of rebuilding those areas through bilateral and multilateral programmes. To that end, the Government hoped, with the support of the international community, to hold a conference to demonstrate solidarity with Guinea. It hoped that the Executive Committee would also provide support for the holding of such a consultation, which would address the problems caused by years of refugee presence in the country. Guinea could then consolidate its stability, participate more effectively in the restoration and maintenance of peace and security in the subregion, pursue its own economic and social development, consolidate and enhance the process of democratization, good governance and the defence of human rights, and work to eliminate poverty. His Government was fully prepared to work with all international humanitarian agencies and organizations with a view to finding a lasting solution to the problems of refugees.

53. Ms. ZAFIROVSKA (Observer for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that flagrant violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms in the Balkans at the outset of the twenty-first century had led her country to host over 360,000 refugees, who accounted for 18 per cent of the total population. As a result of terrorist activities in some parts of the country, there were also large numbers of internally displaced persons. In addition, some 35,000 Macedonian citizens were currently staying in Kosovo. The UNHCR office in Skopje, in cooperation with other United Nations agencies and international organizations, had undertaken a number of activities to help those people, and she expressed appreciation for their efforts. Political measures and financial assistance were both required to solve the problems of refugees and displaced persons; her Government had adopted political measures to address those crises and hoped that UNHCR would provide further assistance in the rebuilding and reconstruction of the affected regions.

54. While experience showed that humanitarian assistance should be accompanied by confidence-building measures, diplomatic efforts aimed at conflict-prevention constituted the best means of addressing the problems of refugees and displaced persons. However, such solutions required time and sustained international commitment. Governments, UNHCR and refugees all had a common interest in ensuring an effective universal protection regime, and her country would play its part in achieving that end.

55. Ms. MINA (Observer for Cyprus) endorsed the statements made on behalf of the European Union and added that, because of its geographical position at the crossroads of three continents and its situation as a divided island, her country faced specific problems associated with displaced persons and economic migration. Those problems could be solved only with the close cooperation of all interested parties. While the problems relating to economic migrants seemed to be moving towards a solution, other problems were more complicated and involved parties other than the Government of Cyprus and UNHCR. Cyprus belonged to a region where existing conflicts perpetuated or aggravated the situation of refugees and displaced persons.

56. Ways must be found of improving the financial base of UNHCR, but the importance of political and moral support for efforts to solve humanitarian problems should also be borne in mind. Responsibility-sharing was an essential form of support for UNHCR activities, as the current humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, which also affected Afghanistan's neighbours, made clear. Her Government would continue to support the work of UNHCR and commended the staff of the Office, both at headquarters and in the field.

57. Mr. KNOTHE (Poland) endorsed the remarks by the High Commissioner on the need to reform UNHCR to meet current and future challenges. His delegation also associated itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union. To fulfil its mandate, UNHCR needed to be able to rely on a partnership of States. Poland had built its own system of refugee protection through the enactment of legislation and the creation of administrative bodies and the valuable experience it had accumulated had produced an effective and sophisticated system. Most recently, in April 2001, Poland had amended its Aliens Act to make it consistent with European s andards.

58. An effective national system of protection was dependent on the involvement of representatives of civil society, and particularly NGOs. Poland had recently expanded its capacity to provide legal assistance to refugees through the introduction of legal clinics at major universities in Krakow and Warsaw. Yet the Polish Refugee Board had observed that the humanitarian institution of refugees was being misused for immigration purposes, which led to an unproductive use of resources. Given that problem and others arising from new patterns of armed conflicts and the growth in trafficking in persons, his delegation strongly supported the process of global consultations.

59. Mr. WISNUMURTI (Observer for Indonesia) commended the efforts of the High Commissioner in the first year of his mandate to address the acute problems faced by refugees and by UNHCR. As a country with first-hand experience of refugee problems, Indonesia was firmly committed to cooperating closely with UNHCR.

60. With regard to East Timorese refugees in West Timor, he said that the withdrawal of UNHCR and other international humanitarian personnel in the wake of the Atambua incident had dealt a significant blow to the repatriation programme in West Timor. Nevertheless, his Government would continue it own efforts until all refugees were either voluntarily repatriated, locally integrated or relocated. The registration of refugees in June 2001, which observers had deemed fair and peaceful, would assist the speedy repatriation or resettlement of refugees on the basis of their own priorities. The Indonesian Government's policy in respect of East Timorese refugees focused on reconciliation, voluntary repatriation and resettlement. With the improvement of security conditions in East Timor, many persons had expressed a desire to return there. In order to repatriate a record number of refugees in just three to four months, multilateral cooperation was vital, so that he appealed for the return of all United Nations personnel to Indonesia, and especially to West Timor, where his Government hoped that the Organization's humanitarian operations would resume. His delegation was confident that the memorandum of understanding between the Indonesian Government and the United Nations regarding security requirements would soon be concluded.

61. The Indonesian Government had strongly condemned the senseless and brutal killing of three United Nations humanitarian workers and six Indonesians in Atambua in 1999. It should be noted that the verdict reached in May 2001 by the North Jakarta District Court was not final, and the Government of Indonesia intended to pursue the case until justice was served. It was to be hoped that the international community would perceive that move as an indication of Indonesia's determination to treat the matter with the utmost seriousness.

62. Mr. BENJELLOUN-TOUIMI (Morocco) drew attention to the report of the Secretary-General on the situation concerning Western Sahara (S/2001/613) and said that updated information on the population of that territory was contained in annex III. It should be noted that the majority of Saharans did not live in the refugee camps at Tindouf, but lived peaceably throughout the territory. Those living in the camps were not free and were thus unable to express their will. Accordingly, his Government believed that they should be afforded international protection, and the international community should consider the possibility of their repatriation. If the settlement plan for Western Sahara was being obstructed, it was not by Morocco. Rather, the lack of progress was due to the stalling of the Frente Polisario and their supporters, as paragraphs 20 to 42 of the Secretary-General's report made clear. However, the

situation in the Sahara had entered a new phase on 29 June 2001, when the Security Council had urged both parties to give consideration to the proposed framework agreement for a settlement, which the Secretary-General had termed "the last window of opportunity for years to come". His delegation therefore hoped that UNHCR would take advantage of the new situation, which would create favourable conditions for the repatriation of Saharan refugees.

63. The international protection of refugees must be strengthened, and the global consultation process was an effective mechanism for doing so. Refugees must be viewed as more than simply mouths to feed. He urged UNHCR to develop its own reliable methodology for calculating the size of refugee populations rather than relying on figures provided by national Governments. Lastly, he urged UNHCR to bear in mind the traditional reluctance of bureaucrats to embrace change and to heed the call for innovative approaches to the problems of refugees.

64. Mr. MADI (Observer for Jordan) endorsed the statement by the High Commissioner and expressed his delegation's regret at and condemnation of the recent terrorist attacks in the United States of America. In that connection, he welcomed the appeals that had been made to refrain from attributing the attacks to a single people or religion. It was to be hoped that those events would not affect the situation of refugees.

65. His delegation believed that the security of UNHCR staff must be ensured by the host country. In that connection, he drew attention to the memorandum of understanding concluded between UNHCR and Jordan and reiterated his Government's readiness to cooperate with UNHCR within that framework.

66. Ms. PRANCHERE-TOMASSINI (Observer for Luxembourg) associated herself with the statement made by the representative of Belgium on behalf of the European Union and said that her Government had allocated 50 million Luxembourg francs (US$ 1.1 million) for assistance to the civilian population of Afghanistan in 2002 and would increase its contribution to UNHCR for the coming year by 20 per cent.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.